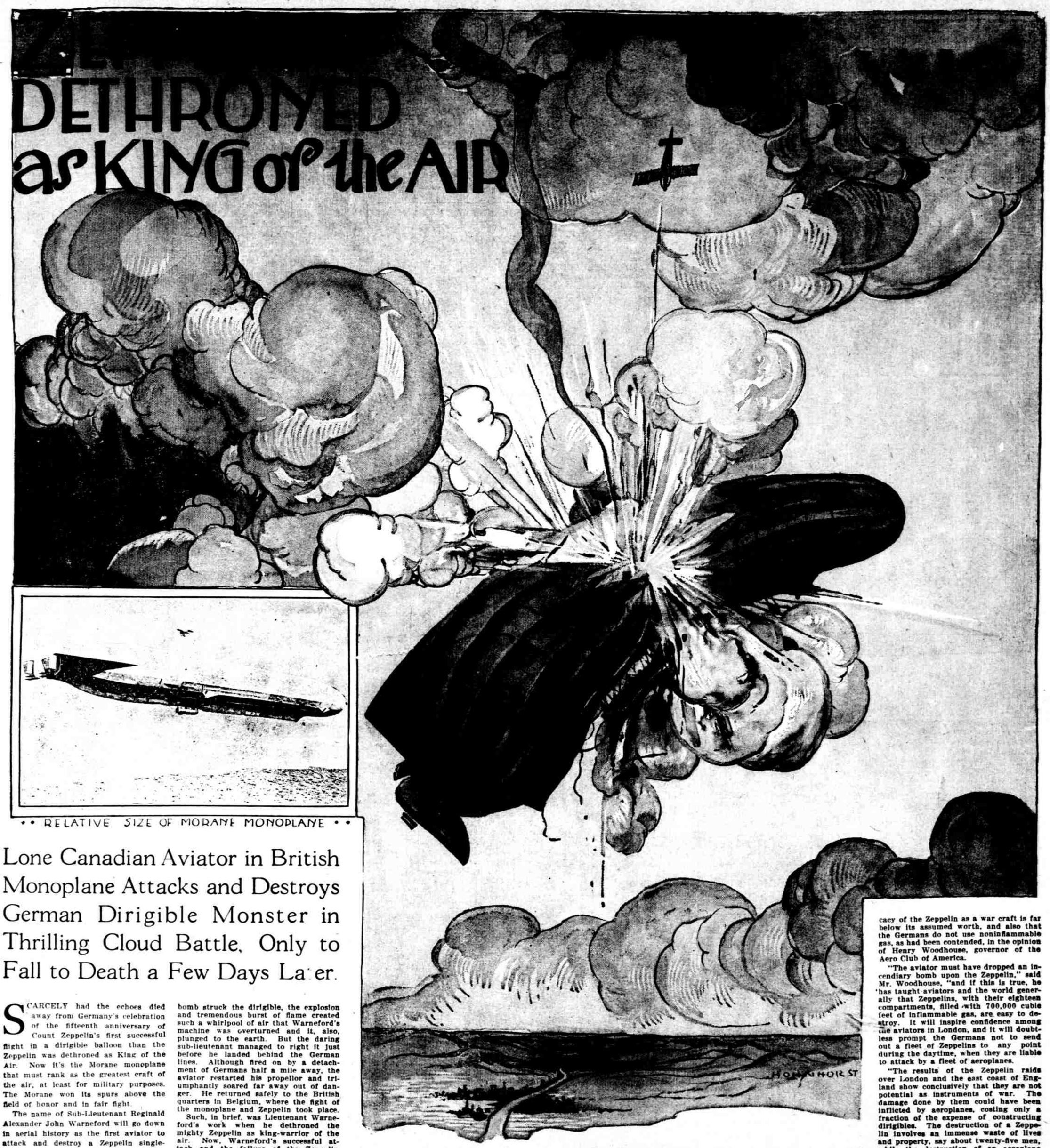




•• RELATIVE SIZE OF MORANE MONOPLANE ••

# Lone Canadian Aviator in British Monoplane Attacks and Destroys German Dirigible Monster in Thrilling Cloud Battle, Only to Fall to Death a Few Days Later.

SCARCELY had the echoes died away from Germany's celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of Count Zeppelin's first successful flight in a dirigible balloon than the Zeppelin was dethroned as King of the Air. Now it's the Morane monoplane that must rank as the greatest craft of the air, at least for military purposes. The Morane won its spurs above the field of honor and in fair fight.

The name of Sub-Lieutenant Reginald Alexander John Warneford will go down in aerial history as the first aviator to attack and destroy a Zeppelin single-handedly. It may be done many times before the war is over, but Warneford was first to perform the feat.

It was one of the most poignant of the minor tragedies of the war that the man who dethroned the Zeppelin lost his life a few days later while simply taking an American correspondent on an exhibition flight. The life was crushed out of Warneford when his machine fell near Buc, France. His passenger, Henry Beach Needham, was also killed. Although the lieutenant lived but a few days after his daring exploit in bringing down a Zeppelin, he lived long enough to see his name emblazoned in print as one of the greatest heroes of the war. His name will not soon be forgotten, even though Warneford himself is no more.

Unaided and unsupported, so to speak, he attacked one of Count Zeppelin's monsters as it was returning from a coast raid on England. By a mighty upward drive Warneford got above the dirigible, hit it with a bomb and sent it crashing to the earth, a flaming mass of twisted iron. Its crew of twenty-eight men perished miserably. Two nuns and two children were also killed, as the burning monster crushed a convent in its fall.

But that was not the end of Warneford's adventure. When the incendiary bomb struck the dirigible, the explosion and tremendous burst of flame created such a whirlpool of air that Warneford's machine was overturned and it, also, plunged to the earth. But the daring sub-lieutenant managed to right it just before he landed behind the German lines. Although fired on by a detachment of Germans half a mile away, the aviator restarted his propellor and triumphantly soared far away out of danger. He returned safely to the British quarters in Belgium, where the fight of the monoplane and Zeppelin took place.

Such, in brief, was Lieutenant Warneford's work when he dethroned the mighty Zeppelin as king-warrior of the air. Now, Warneford's successful attack and the failure of the Zeppelin attacks on London and Paris have done much to destroy the fear of the Zeppelin. England argues that if one aviator in a monoplane can destroy a fully armed and equipped dirigible, the corps of aviators guarding London can certainly prevent any extensive damage by air raiders.

So the peril of the Zeppelin does not loom nearly so large as it did during the first months of the war. It is too vulnerable to attack, too helpless when assailed from above. A monoplane, much swifter and easier to handle, can outmaneuver the unwieldy dirigible, just as Sub-Lieutenant Warneford did the Zeppelin he destroyed over the city of Ghent.

Warneford was a Canadian. He learned flying last winter at the Royal Naval Air Station at Hendon, near London, under Commandr John Cyril Porte, formerly of the Wanamaker transatlantic expedition. He received his certificate from the Royal Aero Club as pilot February 15. Assigned first to the President, an aeronautical tender, he had been in the service barely four months when he was sent on the expedition that resulted in the destruction of the Zeppelin.

With Flight Lieutenants J. P. Wilson, J. S. Mills and E. T. Votee, Warneford was sent on an air reconnaissance north of Brussels. Wilson and Mills destroyed a hangar near Brussels and returned to their base. Warneford kept on and about half way between Brussels and Ghent sighted the Zeppelin, sailing about 6,000 feet high, apparently returning from a raid on the English coast. The dirigible was about fifteen miles away when Warneford sighted it. The time was 2:30 o'clock in the morning, but dawn breaks early in Belgium during the summer months.

The British aviator hastily pumped more fuel into his motors and began a long spiral ascent. He was almost over the Zeppelin before its crew saw him and commenced a rapid bombardment with machine guns. Warneford waited until he was directly over the dirigible before he pressed the spring that released his first bomb. It struck, as did the next four, but they only punctured the vast hide of the balloon. The aviator had descended lower with each bomb and when he released his sixth and last, he was only two hundred feet above the German monster.

The sixth bomb hit a vital spot, for there was a tremendous explosion and a sheet of flame darted clear through the Zeppelin. An instant later, a seething mass of fire, it was well on its 6,000-foot plunge to the earth.

The shock of the explosion had turned over Warneford's monoplane and, head downward, the sub-lieutenant was falling in the hot path of the burning balloon. But 2,000 feet from the convent, on which the blazing dirigible had alighted, the Briton succeeded in righting his plane and gliding to safety in an open plane half a mile from a German detachment.

Although the enemy instantly opened fire on him, Warneford coolly adjusted his craft, started the propellor and darted away before the Germans could reach him. He arrived safely at British headquarters.

So the little David of the air met and conquered the mighty Goliath. The tiny Morane monoplane downed the great Zeppelin and a new record in aerial warfare was written. Hereafter the Zeppelins will not hold near the terror for the people of London and the English coast cities.

In the opinion of American aerial experts, the doom of the Zeppelin as a war machine was forecast that morning over the towers and steeples of Ghent, when the daring Briton in his trusty Morane pursued, overtook and destroyed the dirigible fresh from a successful raid on the British coast.

Of his adventure, the hero had little to say. When finally cornered and forced to speak of his exploits, he told first of the destruction of the hangar at Evere, near Brussels.

"My companions, Wilson and Mills," Warneford said, "let fly with bombs. Several found their mark, and I saw a long flame shoot out from the hangar.

"I reserved myself and my ammunition for further adventures, and proceeded on my journey at an increased height. All of a sudden I perceived on the horizon, about midway between Ghent and Brussels, a Zeppelin flying fast at a height of about 6,000 feet. I immediately flew towards it and when I was almost over the monster I descended about fifteen metres and flung six bombs at it. The sixth struck the envelope of the ship fair and square in the middle.

"There instantly was a terrible explosion. The displacement of air round about me was so great that a tornado seemed to have been produced. My machine tossed upward and then flung absolutely upside down. I was forced to loop the loop in spite of myself. I thought for a moment that the end of everything had come.

"During the whirl I had the pleasure of seeing my victim falling to the earth in a cloud of flames and smoke. Then by some miracle my machine righted itself and I came to earth in the enemy's country.

"I was not long on the ground, you may be sure. I speedily put myself and my machine into working order and then I set the engine going, but—" continued the young man with a quick little smile—"I can say no more, for here is my lunch and I am hungry."

Warneford's exploit proves that the efficacy of the Zeppelin as a war craft is far below its assumed worth, and also that the Germans do not use noninflammable gas, as had been contended, in the opinion of Henry Woodhouse, governor of the Aero Club of America.

"The aviator must have dropped an incendiary bomb upon the Zeppelin," said Mr. Woodhouse, "and if this is true, he has taught aviators and the world generally that Zeppelins, with their eighteen compartments, filled with 700,000 cubic feet of inflammable gas, are easy to destroy. It will inspire confidence among the aviators in London, and it will doubtless prompt the Germans not to send out a fleet of Zeppelins to any point during the daytime, when they are liable to attack by a fleet of aeroplanes.

"The results of the Zeppelin raids over London and the east coast of England show conclusively that they are not potential as instruments of war. The damage done by them could have been inflicted by aeroplanes, costing only a fraction of the expense of constructing dirigibles. The destruction of a Zeppelin involves an immense waste of lives and property, say about twenty-five men, while the destruction of an aeroplane means only the loss of one or two lives.

"The explosion of a monster Zeppelin at an elevation of six thousand feet would cause a terrific aerial disturbance, and might well draw down any other aerial craft within six hundred feet. But this Canadian aviator proved that a steady hand and cool nerve enabled him to come out of the zone with comparatively little danger.

"I think this incident practically eliminates the Zeppelin as a war machine that is to be feared as a great destroying force."

Similar views were expressed by Mr. Alan R. Hawley, president of the Aero Club of America, and one of the most experienced aeronauts of this country. He said the incident indicated that the dirigible never was intended for war uses, and that the Zeppelin was not designed by its builder as a war machine, but as one for peace.

"It shows that Zeppelins are not as dangerous as they are supposed to be and that they are practically at the mercy of an aeroplane flying above them," said Mr. Hawley. "The maximum speed of an aeroplane is at least eighty-two miles, while the minimum speed is forty or forty-five miles. This enables an aeroplane, once the aviator sights a Zeppelin, to maneuver for position above the dirigible and the rest, as was shown by this Canadian aviator, is easy."